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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001387

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SUBJECT: AFGHAN AMBASSADOR ON SAUDI RELATIONS

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Classified By: AMB James B. Smith for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During an October 12 courtesy call, to the Ambassador, Afghan Ambassador Azizullah Karzai admitted fraud had occurred in the recent Afghan elections; lamented the state of Saudi-Afghan bilateral relations; commented on perceived U.S. missteps in Afghanistan; and explained the challenges faced by Afghans resident in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

"I CANNOT SAY THERE WAS NO FRAQ"

¶2. (C) Afghan Ambassador Azizullah Karzai admitted that fraud occurred in the recent Afghan elections, explaining that Afghanistan is very inexperienced with democracy and mistakes are bound to happen. "I cannot say there was no fraud," Karzai said, adding, "What can you expect from a country where most people are illiterate?" Karzai defended President Hamid Karzai-- who is his nephew-- as the best possible candidate, regardless of the outcome of the elections, and insisted that President Karzai was the only person who could effectively unite the country. He went on to say that any power-sharing deal would put too much control in the hands of the Northern Alliance and marginalize the Pashtun South. Karzai dismissed the idea of holding a runoff election, saying that snow was already falling in the mountains, and that there was no funding. The earliest possible time a runoff could be held would be next spring, he observed, and by then the country would have been without a leader for half a year.

LIMITED SAUDI SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN?

¶3. (C) Karzai lamented the SAG,s failure to respond to his many requests for help. He said that SAG funding has stopped since the Bonn Accords, adding, "they took everything back after that." Karzai claimed that he had been asking the SAG to help with Taliban mediation efforts for over a year, but received no response at all. Karzai also complained that the Taliban leadership was raising funds in KSA and that "they pray for the Taliban in the mosques here." He explained SAG support of the Taliban by saying that "they want the fighting to stay in Afghanistan and Pakistan, otherwise the fighters will come back to Saudi. They need a place to send the people who want to do this jihad hobby."

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question of what the Afghans want from the SAG, Karzai heralded the great respect that all Afghans have for the Saudis as the "true descendants of the prophet." He said that all the GOA really wants is to have normal bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, and to be seen as a fellow Muslim country. He added that in addition, they needed help with funding.

U.S. MISTAKES IN AFGHANISTAN

¶5. (C) Karzai stated his support for the U.S. military in Afghanistan, saying that the Afghan people were happy to have the U.S. in their country building bases and roads. The only thing that will turn the people of Afghanistan against the coalition forces, he said, was the death of civilians and disrespect for Afghan customs. "Entering houses at night when the children and women are sleeping, searching the women, bringing dogs into the houses; these things cannot be forgiven." Karzai also complained that the coalition forces do not have a coherent strategy, and that different troops in different regions do not seem to coordinate with each other.

AFGHANS RESIDENT IN SAUDI ARABIA

¶6. (C) Karzai then spoke about some of the difficulties

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facing Afghans in KSA, noting that there are currently 450,000 Afghans living in the Kingdom. He explained that issuing new passports to all Afghans in KSA after the fall of the Taliban had been a challenge, and estimated that 20-25,000 Afghans were living illegally in the Kingdom, with more "staying over" after the hajj every year. This created problems for Afghans who were picked up by the police or could not return to Afghanistan because they lacked proper identification. "This is a normal, complicated problem."
(NOTE: Estimates of unidentified third country nationals are very difficult to verify in KSA. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Karzai does not seem to be very well connected with the SAG, as evidenced by his difficulty getting any substantive response from his requests for assistance. He does offer some insight into the problems that Afghans living in KSA face, and may be a source of information about President Hamid Karzai. END COMMENT.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

¶8. (C) Ambassador Azizullah Karzai is Afghan President Hamid Karzai's uncle. The U.S.-educated Karzai served in the Afghan MFA under King Zahir Shah, with assignments to Pakistan, India, Poland and Iraq. He returned to Afghanistan in 1979 to fight the Soviets. During the Soviet occupation, Karzai was injured and airlifted to a hospital in Washington, DC. While recuperating in the U.S., Karzai met President Reagan. Karzai returned to Afghanistan with his nephew in 2001, to fight the Taliban and act as an advisor and emissary for tribal issues. His previous post was as Afghan Ambassador to the Czech Republic. Karzai is estimated to be 68 years old, and has a grandson who lives in San Diego, CA.
SMITH